

Bring a little moisture to your life with these healthy home accessories

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今日北京

BEIJING TODAY METRO

JANUARY 31, 2014 • No. 659 • PUBLISHED BI-WEEKLY • CN11-0120 • ¥3.00 (METRO & COMMERCE)



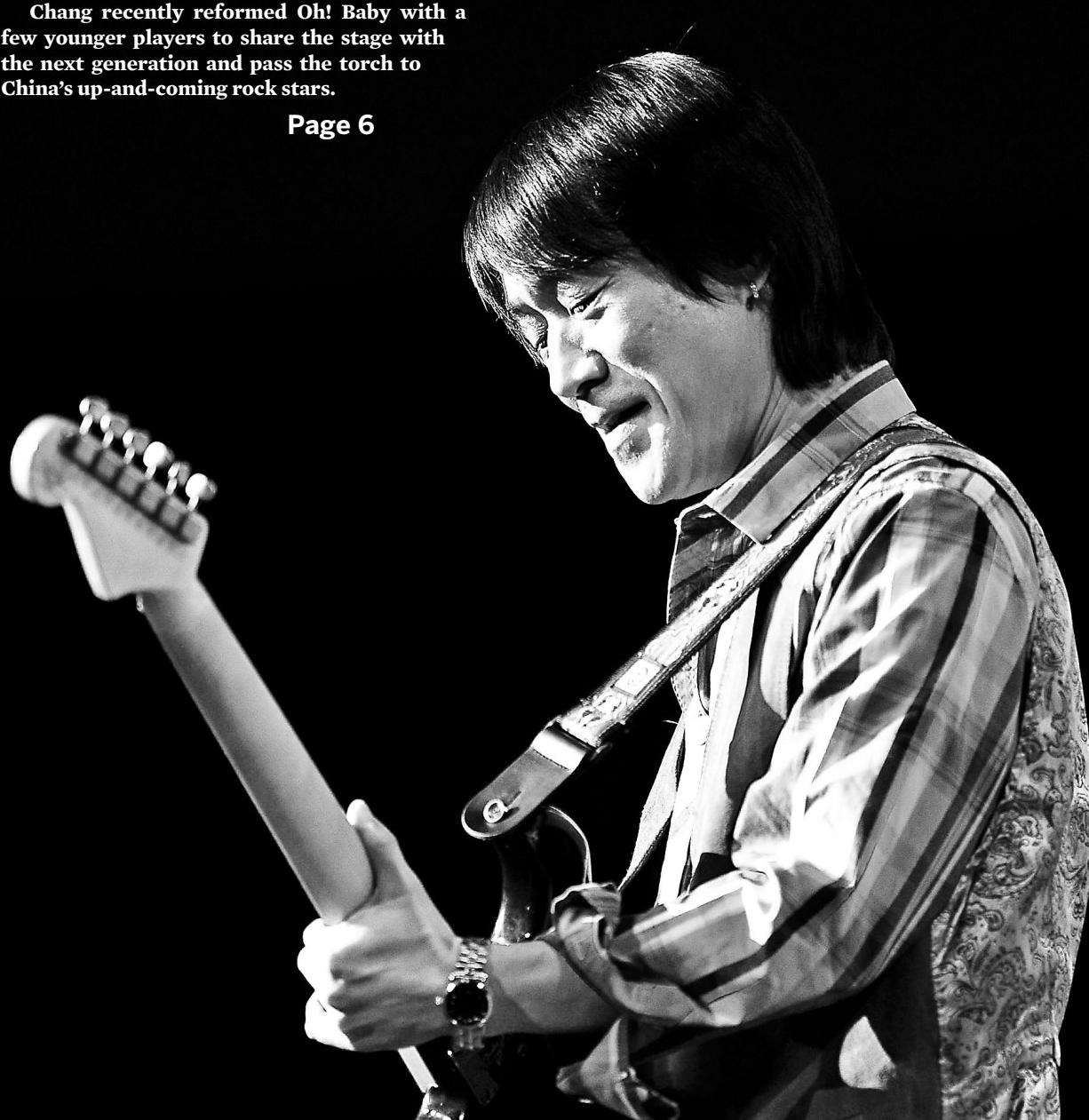
Rock legend back on stage

Chang Kuan is taking to the stage for the first time in many years on February 4 at Yugongyishan.

As one of the rock heroes who defined Chinese music in the '80s, Chang and his band Oh! Baby toured the nation with top acts like Cui Jian, 1989 Band, White Angels and Cobra.

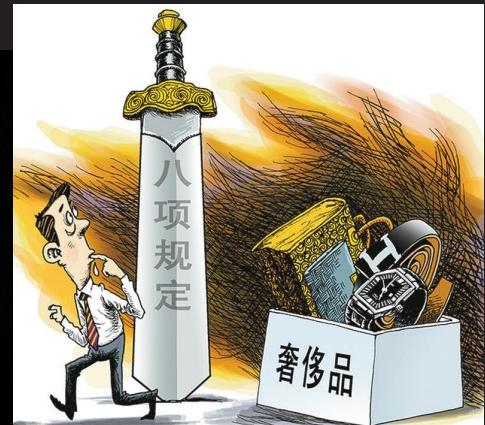
Chang recently reformed Oh! Baby with a few younger players to share the stage with the next generation and pass the torch to China's up-and-coming rock stars.

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北京青年报
BEIJING YOUTH DAILY

Under the auspices of the office of Beijing Municipal Government ■ Run by Beijing Youth Daily Group ■ President: Zhang Yanping ■ Editor in Chief: Yu Haibo ■ Director: Li Xiaobing
■ Address: No. 23, Building A, Baijiazhuan Dongli, Chaoyang District, Beijing, China ■ Zip Code: 100026 ■ Telephone: (010) 65902515 ■ Fax: (010) 6590 2525 ■ E-mail: info@beijingtoday.com.cn
■ Advertisement: (010) 6590 2515 ■ Hotline for subscription: (010) 6590 2626 ■ Overseas Code Number: D1545 ■ 邮发代号1-364 ■ Online Distribution Agents: Spider.com.cn and Kankan.cn

Insurers approved to swap real estate for geriatric care

By ZHAO HONGYI
Beijing Today Staff

The central government is pushing insurers to begin accepting elders' homes in exchange for total care during their twilight years.

The new program would encourage China's aging seniors to move into fully covered group housing, said Xiang Junbo, chairman of the China Insurance Regulatory Commission (CIRC).

Insurers would be allowed to claim the title to the home after the owner dies in exchange for their support in bolstering the country's existing welfare system.

Last September, the State Council published its "Guidelines for Promoting Services to the Elders," in which it stipulated that accepting homes in exchange for care should be one of the major services offered by Chinese insurers.

While the country has a national pension system, many workers are unable or unwilling to participate. The exchange would offer such people another road to coverage.

Last November, Fortune Insurance submitted a blueprint based on its trial program to the CIRC. It has been approved, and will be made available to interested seniors starting next month, said Meng Xiaosu, chairman of the company.

Participating elders can sign over their homes to the insurance company in exchange for pension products and ser-



How to care for the elderly is a coming social storm.

CFP Photo

vices. Those who wish to remain in their homes while benefiting can grant the companies partial ownership.

Ping'an Insurance and New China Insurance are expected to offer similar services later this year.

The homes-for-care swap has been in trial for several years: almost every mention of it has met with harsh criticism.

Scholars and social activists condemn

the program as a new avenue for banksters to rob the aged and infirmed of their few remaining possessions, and many are calling on seniors to boycott the exchange.

But childless, uninsured seniors have nowhere else to turn.

Guo Shuqing, a 76-year-old Beijing woman, is one such example. Ten years ago, her 42-year-old son died in a traffic

accident. Her daughter-in-law remarried and took her granddaughter away. Four years ago she was living with her 78-year-old husband in a three-room apartment.

The couple decided to participate in one of the homes-for-care trial programs. They are currently living in a retirement home and say they are relieved not to have to worry about their food and medical expenses.

City considers pushing people into Hebei as population tops 21.2 million

By ZHAO HONGYI
Beijing Today Staff

The Beijing Bureau of Statistics announced the city's population reached 21.2 million at the end of 2013.

The city grew by 455,000 people since end of 2012, but that growth marked a 0.3 percent decrease from the year-and-year average, according to an announcement at the Municipal People's Congress last week in Beijing.

The city aims to shrink this growth even more to combat congestion downtown.

According to recent news, the city is planning to push 5 million people out of the downtown area and into neighboring Hebei Province or Tianjin. Most of those being moved are expected to be elderly.

City planners envision a downtown transformation that would make Beijing a high-tech hub for young professionals.



Crowds block traffic flow in Beijing Railway Station.

CFP Photo

But further development can only come after careful debate. Years of growth with little forethought have weakened environmental conditions in the city center and depleted scarce natural resources.

The capital continues to be a magnet for

graduates thanks to its high average income.

Last year, the city's GDP reached 1.95 trillion yuan, an increase of 7.6 percent over the previous year.

Average individual incomes grew modestly to 93,213 yuan with average disposable income of about 40,321 yuan, an

increase of 10.6 percent. Farmers' average income grew to 18,337 yuan, an increase of 11.3 percent.

However, the consumer price index (CPI), a common indicator of inflation, continued to climb another 3.3 percent. The costs of daily consumption, food and housing rose 1.9 percent, 4.7 percent and 5.6 percent.

"Our target for economic growth set at the beginning of 2013 was 8 percent," said Xia Qianfang, spokeswoman for the municipal government. "We consider 7.7 percent within the acceptable range."

Global economic slowdown dragged the national economy down during the second half of the year, Xia said.

Since 2011, the city's population growth has been slowing as its per capita GDP falls. The increase in its permanent population was 5.5 percent in 2010, 2.9 percent in 2011, 2.5 percent in 2012 and 2.2 percent in 2013.

Corruption crackdown spells doom for high-end brands

Spring Festival begins today, but for workers in the catering, hospitality and luxury industries, the Year of the Horse will be anything but merry.

On December 4, 2012, the Central Politburo announced its "eight-point regulation" directed at closing many channels of corruption and clamping down on the Party's influence buyers.

By LIU XIAOCHEN
Beijing Today Staff

"For large catering enterprises, this year has been the end of times," said Bian Jiang, vice chairman of China Cuisine Association.

Net profits fell 30 percent in the third quarter, and the crash is only accelerating, he said.

The catering industry has become collateral damage in the central government's war on corruption. With few excuses to give their superiors, Chinese officials have had to scale back their lavish banquets: the most popular avenue of bribery and the industry's top source of income.

Tap dries up

The squeeze has had echoes in other industries as well.

Manufacturers and retail outlets suffering from a sudden lack of access to backroom deals and gift giving have canceled their plans for annual office parties, knocking out another leg of support out from under the catering industry.

Today, many of the country's top restaurants are deserted.

The Ministry of Commerce said the turnover rate in Beijing's catering enterprises has fallen 35 percent. Gourmet food sales have also dropped significantly: abalone sales at the Bird's Nest restaurant fell 40 percent and shark fin soup more than 75 percent.

Even holiday gift basket sales are down 45 percent.

As a listed company, Xiang'eqing lost 303 million yuan during the first three quarters of 2013. The company has announced plans to shutter eight branches in Beijing and Nanjing to cope with the catastrophic loss.

Beijing's Quanjude restaurant also fared poorly, with 10 of its 17 main outlets struggling in the red.

Bain & Co's 2013 Chinese Luxury Market Research Report found that the mainland's luxury market is also slowing with an 11 percent decline in watch and timepiece sales. Sales of high-end alcohols, teas and tonics are also down.

The economic forecast for tourism, the conference and exhibition industries and private clubs is similarly poor.

Shocking policy sends ripples

While the Politburo's eight-point regulation was designed to hurt the bureaucracy and win popular support, its immediate effect was a painful reminder of how much consumption depends on administrative corruption.

Government spending on outbound affairs – transportation and receptions –

The season's lavish parties and expensive gifts are the only way many Chinese business stay in the black. Where last year there was a modest dip in sales, this year employers are being driven to layoffs or bankruptcy as public money grows scarce.

Many international luxury brands stopped issuing false tax invoices in 2013.

"Public funds used to buy favor with other units are routinely written off as 'office supplies' or 'food.' The information about where the purchase was made or how it was used is never indicated," said Shen Enwei, a researcher at the Financial Strategy Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Shen suggested learning from developed countries and Hong Kong and punishing groups or individuals who spend unreasonably.

Normal consumers the future

For the businesses that weather this storm, hope is on the horizon: the masses are starting to consume more as the government spends less.

The China Cuisine Association reports that many dishes once priced 300 yuan have been slashed to 150 yuan in order to reach the general public.

Goubuli, a popular Tianjin baozi chain, cut its prices by 50 percent. To attract more young diners, the chain is cooperating with several group purchase platforms to lure in customers.

Some luxury brands are also changing their China strategy, slowing or reversing their expansion plans and introducing unbranded products.

Herms, Fendi and Céline have already introduced unbranded product lines. Louis Vuitton, Gucci and Burberry announced they will not expand their boutique business to any new Chinese cities.

In the catering industry, the only strategy in place appears to be "waiting." Improved living standards have exposed many problems with traditional modes of service, which are increasingly behind the fast-paced needs of modern consumers.

Several high-end restaurants have shifted their focus to serving the general public's need for holiday, wedding and funeral banquets. A few are expanding to networked orders, delivery, technical services and the acquisition of small restaurants.

The high-end gift industry is also trying to make up for flagging sales by bringing its prices in line with the public's spending ability. A few are moving away from traditional retail models and using e-commerce to slash operating costs.

"Companies need to find a gap in their market segment and a way their service can fill it," Li Zhiqi said.

"That means considering the characteristics of their products and how they can stand out. Brands, whether food, service or environment, are doomed if their only special feature is a price tag."



High-end restaurants are slashing prices to woo the general public.

is staggeringly large. So large that any reduction has severe consequences for multiple industries.

The National Bureau of Statistics reported that the growth rate of the total retail sales has contracted so sharply that the year's average fell lower than its lowest single day in 2012. This collapse has been masked in the GDP by exports and investments, which held strong with more than 20 percent growth.

Among these three economic engines, only consumption has declined since the policy change.

Yu Xiuqin, deputy director of Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics, said it is unclear precisely what percentage of the national consumption is driven by official spending.

"Considering the data, it appears that catering, entertainment and accommodations account for only a small portion consumer retail sales," he said. "In fact, accommodations account for only about 2 percent."

In theory, the eight-point regulation should have limited effect on consumption, he said.

But officials' spending is the driving force behind most of the high-profit, high-end markets for catering and luxury goods, and their abuse has distorted prices

throughout the consumer market in a ripple effect, said Shi Yupeng, an associate professor at the Central University of Finance and Economics.

"[The practice] has inflated prices and restrained consumer's demand, to a certain extent. This policy can help pull the market back to the realm of rationality and grow household consumption in the long term," he said.

"The poor performance of Beijing's catering industry in 2013 shows that past development in this industry was not healthy: it's like a bubble phenomenon," said Li Zhiqi, head of the Beijing Zhiqi Weilai consultancy.

"These downturns expose the blindness of investors. Many enterprises expected they could grow forever by if they relied on the national ministries. With the bubble popped, this is the time to learn who is fit to survive," he said.

With new hard penalties for false tax invoices, that challenge may be tougher than ever.

For years, official spending on luxury products has depended on luxury brands being complicit in a scam. Many high-end products were sold with tax receipts marking Rolex watches as "office supplies" and 10,000 yuan bottles of Maotai alcohol as "food."

Non-profit gallery



James Elaine, Telescope's curator and founder



Telescope's entrance

Irrational Transcendent

By Li Zhenwei

Li Zhenwei, born in northeast China in 1987, was trained from the age of five in traditional Chinese and Western classical drawing and painting.

Born when China was entering the computer age, Li discovered digital technology and access to the outside world through the Internet. Over the years these two worlds collided in his art.

He had already begun to move in this direction, but his years at CAFA he reduced his observations to the simplest of gestures: the dot.

"Everything is made of dots, every line, shape and mass," Li says. "The dot holds all the possibilities and complexities of life and art."

(By James Elaine)



Zhang Xinjun's Solo Exhibition

Beijing artist Zhang Xinjun's work is born out of his relationship with the materials and objects found in everyday life and how they relate to his local surroundings.

His Telescope exhibition collects desks, tables and chairs from his childhood school. In the second gallery space, sleeping bags have been cut up into hundreds of small triangular shapes and stitched together into a womb-like geodesic dome.

(By James Elaine)



Untitled: Outside

By Deng Tai

This solo exhibition focuses on a series of photographs shot in Wangjing Park. Every spring day the parks of Beijing are flooded with soon-to-be newlyweds, camera crews, fake props, flowing gowns and makeup artists who turn the parks into a massive studio set.

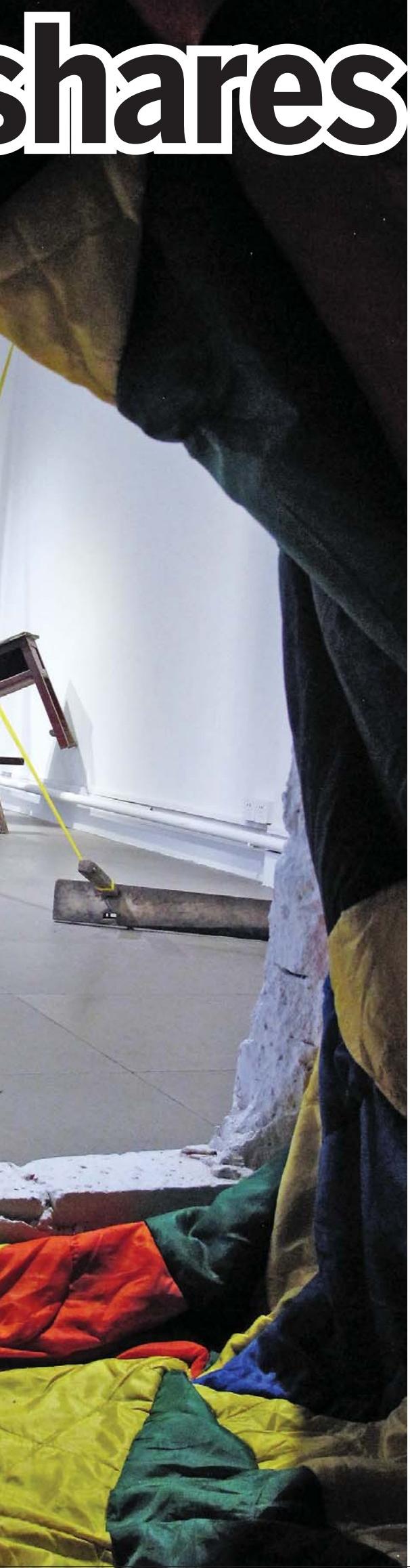
Deng Tai placed himself like a lamppost or uninvited guest into the scenery of several couples.

Half naked, solitary, strangely wrapped in a length of cassette tape, often times obscuring his identity, unnoticed and ignored, he calmly stands with a gaze of mysterious longing for some greater meaning to it all.

(By James Elaine)



R STAGE



shares unique art

By ANNIE WEI
Beijing Today Staff

Unlike its neighbors in the red-brick, high-ceiling buildings of Caochangdi, Telescope curates a different kind of collection.

Rather than collecting the art most likely to sell, curator James Elaine uses his non-profit venue to promote the artists least likely to be known.

For China's young creative talents, it's the opportunity to break out.

Elaine began curating in the late 1980s in a small New York gallery focused on such emerging artists. "Usually they were young – just out of university," he said.

A decade of hard work helped his New York museum win attention. After that, Elaine moved to Los Angeles to work for another non-profit museum.

The move to China may have been predestined: Elaine's mother was born in China when her parents were helping to build a hospital in Qingdao, Shandong Province many years ago.

"I came to China because of my mother and it felt like home immediately," he said.

He began making regular trips to China in 2002 and decided to relocate with his family in 2008.

Since then, Elaine has traveled all over the country to discover artists in need of a chance. His Telescope gallery has curated four exhibitions by the artists Deng Tai, Li Zhenwei, Cheng Qianning and Zhang Xinjun.

While he Elaine was searching for artists and funding, Deng Tai killed himself at the age of 24 without ever having had an exhibition of his own.

The tragedy inspired him to plunge ahead with Telescope, even though his investors never came through with the money.

"Our mission here is to give emerging artists an opportunity and mentor them instead of just using them to make money," he said.

But the lack of focus on profits means Elaine must find money from other sources: foundations, companies, individuals or grants.

Telescope's funding comes from a hodgepodge of US supporters and Chinese philanthropic organizations. A handful of Chinese investors are supporting spaces like Telescope, so Elaine is seeking out individual donors looking to bolster that pool.

Although Telescope does not keep any money from its exhibition sales, Elaine does ask the artists to voluntarily donate a small portion to support their future peers.

"All the artists we've exhibited said they want to give back to us a portion of their sales. The spirit is very hopeful and encouraging," Elaine said.

"This is what I know and what I love to do. It gives my life worth and meaning: I think it's my calling," he said.

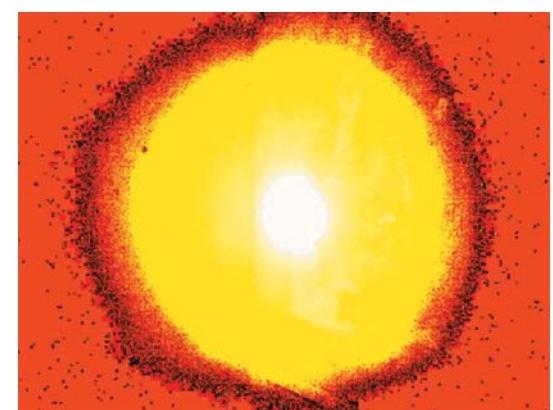
Telescope

Where: 10 Caochangdi, Chaoyang District

Open: Thursday to Sunday, 11 am – 6 pm

Tel: 6433 7031

Website: telescope-beijing.com



Unapproachable Light
By Bai Ye and Cheng Qianning

Two artists from Xi'an, Bai Ye and Cheng Qianning, are having their first solo exhibition in Beijing.

The exhibition is inspired by a Biblical verse referring to a place or a state of being that is beyond the abilities and senses of humankind to enter or perceive, but that exists and beckons nonetheless.

Light is essential in the work of Bai and Cheng. One works with light from within to reveal what is hidden in darkness, hoping to find a way out into the day; the other works with light from without surveying from unseen vantage points the lives and remnants of cities and people below.

One is intimate, the other is objective, but both reveal vulnerable states of man.

(By James Elaine)

Photos provided by Telescope-Beijing

Rock legend returns with young lineup

By ZHAO HONGYI
Beijing Today Staff

Rock star Chang Kuan is taking the stage at Yugongyishan this Spring Festival with his recently reformed band Oh! Baby.

In the 1980s, Chang Kuan was second only to Cui Jian, today recalled as China's godfather of rock.

As a child, Chang studied music theory, learning piano and oboe and moving on to composing by the age of 15. Within a year he was already performing.

Chang released *Marching Toward Life*, his first album, in 1984. He was named one of China's Ten Most Outstanding Youth two years later with the release

of *Toward the Arms of Love*, his second album.

In 1989, Chang formed Oh! Baby, one of China's first rock acts, with musicians Zhao Muyang, Zhang Weining, Chen Jin and Ma Pei. Named for a song on his second album, the band toured the country with top acts like Cui Jian, 1989 Band, White Angels, Breath Band and Cobra.

Oh! Baby was eventually featured on NHK's Lunar New Year's Eve Gala in 1991, launching Chang's career in Japan. From there the band broke into Taiwan, a market that had been closed off due to cross-strait politics.

Over the next decade Chang performed at charity events and toured Europe to perform both music and drama.

US guitar maker Fender appointed Chang as their Chinese spokesman in 2002 and Chang retired from the stage.

Chang recently reorganized Oh! Baby with bassist Wang Lei, keyboard player Xiao Nan and Ma He. The reformed band is intended to take Oh! Baby in a new direction rather than merely cover its past success.

"I wanted to bring a younger generation in to join our band and share the stage," Chang said. It's a move calculated to share the spotlight as much as it is to pass the torch to a new generation of Chinese artists.

The February 4 show will be Chang's first in many years. Local DJ Ouyang will serve as the warm-up band.



Yugongyishan

Where: 3-2 Zhangzizhong Lu, Dongcheng District

When: 9 pm, February 4

Price: 150 yuan at the door, 100 yuan in advance

Tel: 8402 8477, 6404 2711

Web:

yugongyishantickets.taobao.com

Zhongshan prepares holiday entertainment

By ZHAO HONGYI
Beijing Today Staff

Zhongshan Music Hall is hosting nine nights of performances in celebration of Chinese New Year.

Located in the heart of Zhongshan Park on the west side of the Forbidden City, the venue is promising some of the week's best operas, crosstalk, shows folk music and symphonies, as well as a gala geared for local audiences.

The first and second day of the festival will feature Peking opera performance by many of the most famous current performers.

Wang Rongrong, Du Zhenjie, Chi Xiaojun, Chen Junjie and Zhang Huifang from Peking Opera Theater will be joined by

several older singers. Stories slated for performance include such classics as *The Top Scholar's Marriage*, *Suo Lingnang*, *The Drunk Imperial Concubine*, *Legend of the White Snake* and *Silang Tangmu*, as well as modern Peking operas like *Red Lantern Legend*, *Shajia Band* and *The Occupation of Weihu Shan*.

The artists represent four styles of Peking opera, namely Mei, Shang, Chen and Xun, and the five old styles of Ma, Tan, Zhang, Qiu and Zhao. Each performance will begin with the Jumping God of Fortune, a traditional habit of Peking opera.

Famous singers Liu Bianyi, Jiang Jiaqiang and Geng Lianfeng will perform on the third and fourth days. Selected songs include patriotic and folk numbers like "My Motherland," "Nanni Wan," "Sing a

Song for the Party," "On the Golden Hill in Beijing," "Commemorate Comrades," "On a Place Far Away," "A Beautiful Legend" and "Katyusha."

Days five and six will feature the crosstalk of Fang Qingping, Li Jianhua, Li Zengrui, Li Jindou, Li Guoqing, Shi Fukuan and Li Kuan. The teams will be performing popular routines like "Rao Kouling," "Battle Between a Talker and Flatterer," "Discussion on Local Theater," "A Moment of Happiness" and "The Fashionable Old Guy."

"Going to see a crosstalk show on the fifth day of Spring Festival is an Old Beijing tradition," said Li Jindou said. "We tried to arrange our programs to keep a balance where both the old and young can enjoy them."

On the February 14, the eve of the Lantern Festival, there will be several folk song performances such as "Liang Shanbo Versus Zhu Yingtai," "Prelude of Spring" and "Jasmine Flower."

"This year, the Lantern Festival falls on the same day as Valentine's Day," said Zhang Gaoxiang, troupe manager of Chinese Broadcasting Folklore Troupe. "We'll emphasize love and happiness in the programs we present. Hopefully it shows the audience another side of folk."

Zhongshan Music Hall

Where: Inside Zhongshan Park, Xi Chang'an Jie, Xicheng District

When: 7-9 pm, February 1 to 14

Tel: 6559 8285, 6559 8306

Web: zhongshanyinyuetang.com

Sustainable items for dry weather

By ANNIE WEI
Beijing Today Staff

Spring Festival has arrived without a snowflake in sight. If you're staying in Beijing over the holiday, finding ways to keep your moisture levels up will be essential to ward off sinus infections and skin damage.

Brita water filter

A dedicated tap water filter (from 3,000 yuan) is an awfully expensive investment for your kitchen – especially when renting.

You can buy a Brita water filter (less than 500 yuan) to purify your water for much less. It can quickly purify water for cooking, cleaning vegetables and running your humidifier.

Website: germany360.taobao.com



CFP Photo



Inexpensive moisturizer

Why is Sichuan Province known for producing beautiful women?

The weather. High humidity guarantees good skin and the chili peppers help to burn fat.

For women who have to suffer Beijing's dryness, make sure to wear plenty of moisturizer.

You don't need to spend a lot for something good. Try this one by Shishedo (70 yuan for 150 milliliters).

B.H.G

Where: Ground floor, Sanlitun Tai Koo Li, 19 Sanlitun Lu, Chaoyang District

Open: 10 am – 10 pm
Tel: 6417 6110

Paper humidifier

If you live in a well-heated apartment you probably suffer from a dry or bloody nose.

You could try a humidifier, but in Beijing they are bound to run into problems. The city has exceptionally hard water, meaning every humidifier is guaranteed to bind up with minerals after only a few weeks of use.

Humidifiers priced less than 900 yuan also tend to be noisy and are sure to disturb your sleep.

This is where paper humidifiers come in handy. Each is placed in a tiny container with distilled water. Place them anywhere in the apartment that could use a little extra moisture.

The theory is the tiny fiber absorbs water and releases it into the air.

The instruction manual says it takes 20 paper flowers (20 yuan each) to humidify a 15-square-meter room. We tested them out and found the grass humidifiers work better than the flower ones, and absorb more water.

For leaves: momoliangpindian.taobao.com

For flowers: 94ido.taobao.com



Photo by A.A.



CFP Photo

Detox

The human body is pretty efficient at detoxifying itself, but the amount of pollution in the modern world can be overwhelming.

When your body is clear of toxins and full of clean water, it helps your skin to shine and lends a flawless complexion.

Toxins enter the body via the skin, lungs and food chain: ideally, the Spring Festival holiday is a great opportunity to escape to somewhere less populated with good weather and ample humidity.

If you choose to stay in town, use the holiday break to clean up your house. Replace any chemical-laden household cleaners with natural alternatives. You can find them in markets that sell imported food or make your own using baking soda and vinegar.

Foods for Spring Festival

By ANNIE WEI
Beijing Today Staff

Figuring out where to eat can be a challenge for anyone who stays in the capital. The city's restaurants began closing 20 days ago so staff could go home for the holidays.

A number of the fruit and vegetable markets are closed as well.

Stock your fridge with easy meals

Chinese bacon and sausage

Although most supermarkets have no shortage of sausages, the taste and quality vary wildly depending on where they were produced.

Hunan Larou (bacon), for example, has an intense smoky smell and taste, and is ideal for slicing and frying with leeks and chili peppers.

Cantonese cured pork, chicken, fish and sausage are better suited for steaming and using as a rice topping. Pair the meat with fried vegetables for a simple and delicious meal.

Zongzi

These dumplings are made of glutinous rice and wrapped in bamboo or reed leaves. They are cooked by steaming or boiling for four to five hours.

Zongzi is a popular traditional food in South China.

Guangxi's zongzi are known for their unusually large size and layers of glutinous rice and peeled mung beans with fillings like chestnut, pork, ribs, beef, black rice and even a pig foot.

 Chinese bacon



Zongzi

Choose whichever is most appealing.

You can slice and pan fry a zongzi for an easy breakfast.

Meatballs

For the truly lazy, nothing is easier than meatballs. They can be deep-fried or used to flavor a soup. A sealed bag will keep forever in your freezer.

However, choose your meatballs with care when at the supermarket. Skip the local ones: meatballs shipped from Fujian Province are usually the best.

People from Fujian are especially fond of meatballs and consequently picky about their ingredients.



Meatballs CFP Photos

If you plan to cook at home, your best bet at this point is to shop at a large chain supermarket. If that's not appealing, consider this week's restaurant recommendations: both will be open over the holidays.



Salty Sichuan fit for a feast

Beijing has thousands of Sichuan restaurants, but JinfuYanbang stands out for presenting Yanbang, a cuisine unique to the well-salt city of Zigong.

For hundreds of years, Zigong's salt business attracted investors from all over the country. At one point there were more than 200,000 people working in its salt production.

Those prosperous years led a dining boom that resulted in what is today known as Yanbang cuisine, a style characterized by strong, heavy and rich flavor.

Emperor Soup (38 to 228 yuan per person) is a good starter. The broth is cooked for 28 hours using the best base materials and mixed with expensive seafood and other healthy ingredients.

Tuiqiuyu dual hotpot (148 yuan) is the restaurant's must-try dish. It comes in light and spicy varieties. The fish used is a largemouth bronze gudgeon, native to the fastest waters of the upper Yangtze River. Its meat is tender, fresh and free of small bones.

JinfuYanbang has good ambience and is bustling with excitement during peak hours. It also has a lovely courtyard with the traditional tall brick walls and pool.

The restaurant is divided into three floors with wood flooring and stairs. The walls are decorated with old time photos of Zigong's salt industry and feature businessmen, workers and street scene.

Call in advance to book a table because the restaurant is packed every day.

Jinfu Yanbang
Where: 31 Zhongguancun Nan Dajie, Haidian District
When: 11 am - 9 pm
Tel: 6819 6222

Zigong cuisine has many stewed meats and vegetables. CFP Photo



Fried shrimp, 88 yuan

CFP Photo

Kongyiji captures spring in cuisine

The most famous Chinese poems about spring describe the beautiful scenery south of the Yangtze River, a region known colloquially as Jiangnan.

Kongyiji Shangya, located near Chaoyang Park, tries to capture the atmosphere with interior decor that includes a pavilion, bridge and running water.

Jiangnan is known for its peach blossoms, plump fish and fresh bamboo shoots, so when dining at Kongyiji the Yangtze River fish (88 to 558 yuan) is a must.

The restaurant offers several bamboo dishes to choose from, such as sauteed shrimps with spring bamboo shoots (78 yuan) and fried water chestnuts with fresh bamboo shoots (62 yuan).

Bamboo shoots are freshest in

spring and taste light and tender.

The restaurant serves many other Jiangnan classics, such as Longjing shrimp (128 yuan), fried shrimp cooked with Longjing tea leaves.

The stinky tofu is known for being chewy but not especially pungent. For something different, order the steamed peppers and stinky tofu (28 yuan).

Beijing Today suggests drinking the Bingdiao Huangjiu (68 yuan) rice wine, warmed with preserved plums (2 yuan) and sliced ginger (2 yuan).

Kongyiji Shangyan
Where: 8 Chaoyang Gongyuan Xi Lu, Chaoyang District
When: 11 am - 10 pm
Tel: 6508 2228, 6508 7878